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ABSTRACT

The results of personal interviews with 18 of the more experienced online searchers in Washington State are presented. A profile of respondents determines the experience of each in searching in years, number of searches per month, vendors used, and most used data bases. This information is used to analyze the answers given to questions about the promotion of online searches, needed skills for novice searchers, the maintenance of one's expertise, methods of funding searches, preference for searching alone or with the requestor, the value of an online users group, and suggestions for improvements. Helpful hints for the novice searcher and additional comments were also solicited. (Author/JVP)

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ATTITUDES OF ONLINE SEARCHERS IN WASHINGTON STATE

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PURPOSE

In order to provide the online searchers in Washington State with information about where other searchers stand on certain issues in online searching, this study has sought to "take the pulse" of the online user community in Washington. In doing this the author hopes to give them a foundation upon which they can base some decisions about where they would like to see online searching progress in this state. This report is also an attempt to fill in the online picture for those who are new searchers or who work in isolation from other searchers.

The author conducted taped, personal interviews with eighteen of the more experienced online searchers in Washington State. The intention was to look for searchers who were past the novice stage, and had enough experience with online searching so that they would have some fundamental opinions on the issues that were raised. It should be kept in mind, therefore, that the sample is intentionally skewed so that in-depth interviews were conducted with those who were well-seasoned in online searching.

METHODOLOGY

To find those who had the most experience, the author talked to many online searchers, asking them who they felt to be the most experienced searchers in Washington. The concentration was upon those who were mentioned twice or more. Those who were in a unique position in some way, whether by type of library, type of data base or vendor used, or geographical location, were also sought out.

The taped interviews averaged about one half hour, and focused upon rather open-ended questions about a wide assortment of topics. There were seventeen separate questions, not counting optional probes used at the author's discretion during the interview. For the most part, probes were not needed, as the respondents spoke openly and candidly about the topics. However, it should be remembered that the questions were open-ended, so that, for instance, while twelve people mentioned the use of printed material to promote

services, there may be a few more who use it but didn't think to mention it. Thus, these questions tend to measure the emphasis that librarians put upon these topics, rather than to catalog comprehensively all of the possible variations.

These questions are presented in the order in which they were asked, numbered consecutively. For the reader's convenience they are grouped by topic, so that the table of contents may be used to quickly turn to whichever topic is desired.

Using the transcripts from the interview tapes, the author did some content analysis on them, grouping answers by category and noting some of the answers that, although in the minority, offer unusual or controversial opinions on the topic at hand.

The rest of this study, then, consists of a profile of the results to this questionnaire.

FINDINGS

The following four questions were asked to establish a profile of the eighteen respondents. In some cases the answers were used to check for correlations between online experience and opinions.

1. How long have you been doing online searching?

The average was 2.77 years, with a range of 1 to 7½ years. There were two people with one year of experience, but both of them do a larger than average business.

The median was 2.5 years, the mode was 3 years (with four responses).

2. Approximately how many online searches per month do you personally do, not including regular SDI searches?

The average was 23 searches per month, with a range of 0 to 70. The person who answered 0 is an online coordinator, and for this reason her opinions were solicited.

The median was 20, the mode was 15 (with four responses).

3. What vendors do you use?

Lockheed, 16. SDC, 15. NLM, 5. New York Times and Trisnet, 4 each. BRS and Informatics, 1 each.

Of the people who used more than one vendor, three volunteered a personal preference (not just volume) for Lockheed. No other preferences were stated, although this question was not probed, and one librarian said of another in the study that she preferred SDC.

4. What are your most-used data bases?

NTIS, 9. Compendex, 5. Eric, Psychological Abstracts, Medline and CAB Abstracts, 4 each. Tris, ABI/Inform, N.Y. Times Information Bank, Chemical Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Agricola and Biosis, 2 each. Management Contents, Energyline, Comprehensive Dissertation Index, Cancerline, Catline, Inspec, Paperchem, 1 each.

As can be seen, NTIS got the most votes by far. Some librarians mentioned that they liked to develop their strategy on NTIS, then move to other data bases.

As a further indication of the eighteen respondents, they have been grouped by type of library in which they work: University, 8. Special, 8. Public, 2.

In addition, eight of them are the only librarians who do online searching in their respective libraries.

PROMOTION OF ONLINE SERVICES

5. How have your users found out about your online services?

6. Have online services been promoted to your users? In what way?

These two questions sought to determine what kinds of promotional activities were most common, as well as to determine what the librarians saw as the most effective ways in which their users found out about online services.

In addition to what the individual librarians said were their most effective means of informing the user, the questions tested whether some respondents would add material to #6 which they didn't originally include in #5. This might indicate that for those activities which they originally left out, they didn't really feel that they were effective.

For the most part, this was the case. A librarian would respond to #6 with a comment about a demonstration where she clearly felt that it was of minimal value in advertising online services. Still, most of the respondents included all relevent activities in #5, and only echoed much of the same information in #6. The numerical data is given in Table 1:

Table 1
Promotion of Online Services

	Seminars or demonstrations	Printed material	Word-of-mouth
#5:	8	10	10
#6.	4	2	2
Total	12	12	12

The answers for #6 in Table 1 are for those respondents who did not duplicate their answers for #5.

In addition, five people mentioned that they gave tours, and four mentioned that they promote online services on an individual basis with the user. One person claimed the questions were not applicable to her situation, and did not respond further.

As the numbers indicate, and as the respondents' conversations confirmed, seminars and demonstrations were not especially emphasized, while word-of-mouth was. Of those who indicated a strong preference, two special librarians mentioned especially strong promotion campaigns using demonstrations to staff, while three others (two university librarians and one public librarian) emphasized the magnitude of word-of-mouth advertising. Although mentioned frequently, printed materials were not strongly emphasized.

A closer look at the word-of-mouth answers is called for. For the most part, the categories in #5 received a mixed vote among special, university, and public librarians. Word-of-mouth advertising was the

exception. In #5, the non-directional question, eight of nine university and public librarians mentioned word-of-mouth advertising, while only two of eight special librarians did the same. Only one more special librarian added her vote to this category in #6, leaving five special librarians as the only five respondents who didn't mention word-of-mouth advertising in either question.

To investigate this further, the combined data from these two questions has been cross-matched with the data received in #11, the question about how online services are funded at their libraries. The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2
Comparison Between Promotional Activities
And Type of Funding

	User does not pay	User pays
Seminars or Demonstrations (12)	9	3
Printed Materials (12)	8	4
Word-of-Mouth (12)	5	7

Again, conversations with the respondents support the numbers: Reliance upon seminars, demonstrations, or printed materials are weaker when the user pays the cost of the service, while reliance upon word-of-mouth advertising increases.

One point that might be argued is that this is only a manifestation of the differences between special libraries and publicly-funded libraries. The problem with this argument, though, is that the correlation is much weaker when the same promotional data is cross-matched against type of library. Table 3 shows this:

Table 3
Comparison Between Promotional Activities
And Type of Library

	Special (8)	University (8)	Public (2)
Seminars or Demonstrations (12)	6	4	2
Printed Materials (12)	5	5	2
Word-of-Mouth (12)	3	7	2

The delineations are there, but fainter. The "wild card" here is that some publicly-funded librarians (including both public librarians) have their online costs paid for by other organizations or grants. They usually included demonstrations and printed materials in their comments.

It is true, though, that in their discussions of the topic, the special librarians seemed to emphasize such promotional activities more than most university or public librarians. As mentioned before, two special librarians were especially energetic about seminars and demonstrations. Many of the special librarians mentioned that they perform such services as a regular part of orientation for those who are new to the company staff. Such service by university and public librarians was usually on a more haphazard basis.

As a part of #5, three special librarians answered that their promotional activities are not especially strong for online services, since they view online as an integral part of the regular reference service. This sentiment was supported by three other people, two of them university librarians. They felt that while online services hadn't yet reached that point, they <u>should be</u> fully integrated into the regular reference process. Of these six librarians, only one charges her users directly for online costs.

There were two other topics which seemed to correspond with each other, that some of the respondents brought out in #6. One was the

misleading attitude that "This service can solve everything". Five respondents specifically mentioned this, four of them relating the problem to the user, two of them mentioning it in connection with other librarians. Of these five respondents four were special librarians, and none of them charged their users.

The other topic was the fear of being flooded with requests which impede adequate service, and thus there was the need to promote selectively. Six librarians, covering all types of libraries, mentioned this.

Three of the librarians mentioned both topics, relating them closely. They emphasized selective promotion in order to curb the two problems. The other three who mentioned "fear of flooding" also cited the use of selective promotion to solve that problem. The question of who to selectively promote to was not so easily solved. One person advocated starting off in the subject with which you are most familiar. Another person mentioned the need to promote it primarily to those whose support you most desire, and who hold the pursestrings.

As a final note, one special librarian said that to promote the service she gave classes in online searching, and encouraged the users themselves to sit down at the terminal and run their own searches. This was the only person to mention allowing the user direct access to the terminal.

SKILLS FOR BEGINNING ONLINE SEARCHERS

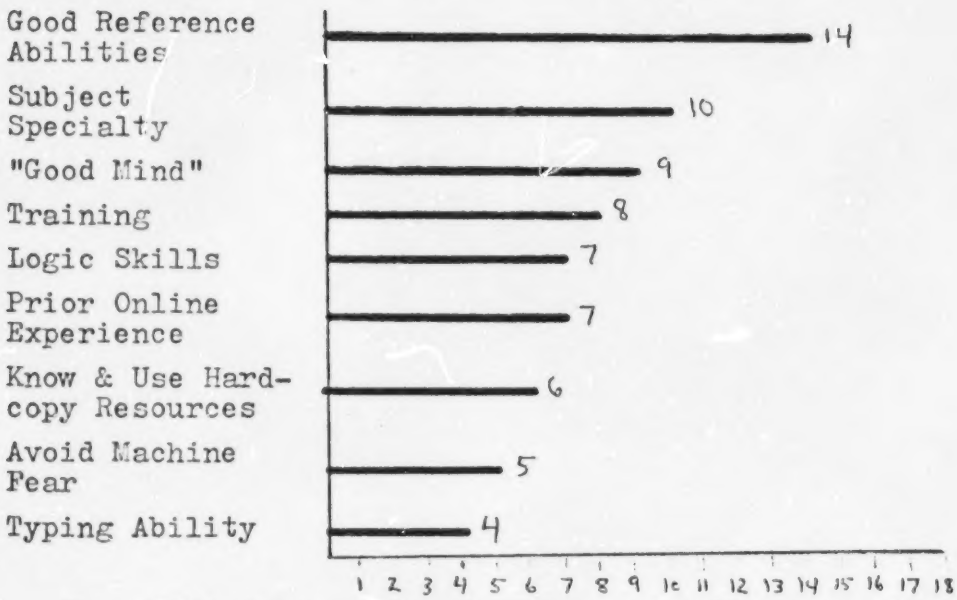
7. What kinds of skills do you think a beginning online searcher should have?

8. If you were to write a job description for a beginning online searcher, what would you ask for?

#8 was meant to focus the minds of the respondents on specific skills by referring to an actual job situation, where theoretically

they would be in the decision-making position of hiring a new searcher. #7 may have been unnecessary, since #8 certainly seemed to give focus to the topic, and all that #7 did was to add more votes to the different categories, without changing the ratios. Consequently, this section will consist of the combined data to the two questions, which can be found in tabular form in Table 4:

Table 4
Skills for Beginning Online Searchers



The skill that was by far the most often required was that of good general reference, with 14 citations. If the searcher has good reference abilities, the librarians said, that person might make a good online searcher. Without those basic reference abilities (such as reference interviewing and knowledge of printed abstracting and indexing tools) that person is severely handicapped before even beginning to learn online skills.

As mentioned earlier, some librarians already treat online as a regular reference operation, while others endorse this policy. In this question some of the respondents really pushed the similarity of good online work to good basic reference work.

There were other strongly supported categories, though. Many librarians (10) felt that special subject knowledge is necessary,

although the depth of conviction varied. Some felt it would be "nice", while others considered it vital, especially in the physical sciences.

A category which was less easily defined, yet strongly felt, was that of a "good mind". One person expressed the need for a "conceptual mind", while others mentioned the flexibility required of a searcher, both online and off. Many people found this desire for native intelligence hard to describe, yet very necessary when measuring the abilities of a new online searcher. Some expressed their frustration at the difficulty in quantifying such criteria. One librarian said that in things like this you never really know until you get them on the job. Another referred to the usefulness of "curiosity skills".

Online skill-specific material followed these three categories, with training receiving 8 citations, and logic skills getting 7, tying it with prior online experience. Combining these online-specific materials reveals that twelve librarians mentioned at least one of these three items, still falling short of the demand for good reference abilities.

Overall, the numbers were indicative of the conversational views toward online skills. Necessity of good reference librarianship was often emphasized, with the specialized subject knowledge that often aids in making a superior reference librarian lending its support. Online-specific skills are brought out only after these apparent "basics" are met.

One point that is hidden by the numbers is that while prior online experience received a relatively light seven votes, five of those who voted for it mentioned it before mentioning anything else. Not all were especially enthusiastic about it, but it did pop into mind first. Perhaps this is indicative of a reluctance to have to start somebody from scratch.

Another concern that was voiced in other questions as well as in these two was the need to avoid machine fear, or fear of the new technology. Six respondents in all mentioned that all too often

this is a real problem that must be overcome before a searcher can really develop professionally. The solution that was most often cited was that the searcher needed to take a deep breath (or a stiff drink) and plunge right in, realizing that everybody makes mistakes when they start something new, and online work is no exception. In other words, familiarity would gradually erase the feeling of reluctance.

Some librarians seemed reluctant or embarrassed to mention it, but typing ability was seen by some to be important enough to include in the criteria. Apparently there were some librarians who had had bad experiences along this line, and so were sensitive to it.

MAINTENANCE OF EXPERTISE

9. How much online searching per month would you say is necessary for a searcher to maintain his or her expertise?

While most of the respondents gave numerical answers, they were sometimes difficult to combine meaningfully. Most expressed their answer in number of searches, but others referred to the number of hours necessary, and often would not or could not break that down into a number of searches. It seemed, though, that those who expressed their answer in hours required more of the searcher than those who answered by citing a number of searches. One said a couple of hours a day, while another gave a range of 5-20 hours a month.

Of the fifteen numerical responses, five gave their answers in ranges. In order to average the numerical data, two averages are presented. One incorporates the low end of the ranges into the total, the other uses the high end. The two figures received were 18 and 25.

It should be emphasized, though, that these figures are very deceptive. Only two respondents actually gave answers that fell between 18 and 25. These numbers are really a result of some pretty wide extremes. The range of the respondents' answers stretched

from 1 to "about 80". And, as was mentioned earlier, there were some who expressed their answers in hours.

In addition, there were three who answered "more than I do", and would not or could not give a numerical response. One other gave the same response, but then added a number afterwards.

The answers to this question have been compared with the number of searches that each respondent does, given in #2. In all, there were six librarians who fell short of the number of searches they felt to be required to maintain expertise, four of them admitting it. One other broke even, and the two who expressed their answers in hours may fall short as well, depending upon what you believe to be the proper search:hour conversion ratio. Their figures for #2:#9 were 50:40 and 20:5-20.

The most apparent result of this question is that there is a huge lack of consensus concerning this topic. In the light of the answers to this question, some of the librarians' comments that online work may be a good prototype for evaluation of reference service seem far-sighted. While it may be a good idea, there is the necessity for online searchers to agree among themselves as to how experienced they should be, before they present their work to others as a viable model for evaluation of reference.

One other sidelight to this question is that three librarians mentioned that they approved of one or two librarians in a library becoming the online experts, rather than spreading the work around. The reasoning for this, of course, is that it is better to have a couple of really skilled searchers than to have many marginally skilled ones. One librarian was strongly opposed to this notion, though, since she saw that there were dangers of elitism among searchers which would alienate them from the others in their organization, resulting in in-house factionalism which most libraries can ill afford.

COSTS FOR ONLINE SERVICES

10. If a library can't absorb the full cost of online services, do you think those services should be offered to the users for a direct fee, or should the library not offer the services?

11. How are online services funded at _____?

The facets of the topic of cost for online services are so many and complex that it wouldn't be possible to address them in this short survey. Instead, #10 zeroes in on a specific hypothetical question, seeking a meaningful answer to a sharply drawn question. If some philosophy of online costs emerged from the answer, that was fine, but it couldn't be depended upon.

It was found, though, that the question wasn't drawn sharply enough. Most librarians had the tendency to qualify their answer by relating it in terms of their own library. It seemed sometimes that they were using it as a tool to avoid giving a firm answer. In these cases the questioner probed a bit more, often redrawing the picture to make it plain that this was purely a hypothetical question, and it was only their opinion on this particular situation that was wanted.

In totaling up the results, an overwhelming consensus was found. Sixteen of the eighteen librarians felt that the service should be offered, for a fee if necessary. Of the remaining two special librarians, one was opposed to charging in a special library, but thought that it was all right for a public library to charge if it had to. The other expressed extreme disapproval of using taxpayers' dollars to pay for the service in a public library, especially when you considered that <u>all</u> costs must be taken into account, including such things as increased interlibrary loan. There were two other respondents that objected to charging for personnel costs unless the personnel was really good.

Of the sixteen who were in agreement, there was some qualification. One felt that it was unfair that companies could get free searches done at the public library, while another basically agreed, saying

that beyond a certain point the companies should pay.

There were, however, many more fervent supporters of charging if necessary. Three respondents said specifically that the user should be given the option, while two others added that as long as the user is informed of the advantages and disadvantages of online searching, there is no problem in charging for service.

Two respondents were quite adamant about it, taking the stand that by denying the user access to online services, you are overstepping your responsibilities by denying him information.

Finally, there were two librarians who mentioned the possibility of waiving fees for hardship cases.

For the most part the answers for #11 were used in comparison with other questions. There's not much to this question that is significant by itself. Probably to nobody's surprise, it was found that all the university librarians (except for one and part of the costs of another) charged their users the direct costs for online work, which typically include computer and telephone connect time, plus printout costs and a slight overhead. All of the special librarians (except for one, whose users usually pay by budget number) charge their users nothing for the service. The public librarians don't charge for the service at this time, but the future is uncertain. This, incidentally, has contributed to making it practically impossible to conclude anything from this study about online services in public libraries. Only two of them were interviewed, and their funding is covered by a local bequest, something that is a bit rare.

SEARCHING ALONE OR WITH THE REQUESTOR

12. Do you prefer searching alone or having the requestor present during the search?

This question was a latecomer, added after the first person interviewed volunteered a strong opinion on it. It sounded as if it was a question that would help to reveal some of the respondent's basic online philosophy.

It did just that. It turned out to be probably the most controversial and revealing question of the whole survey.

Briefly stated, the results were that six librarians preferred searching alone, six preferred searching with the requestor present, and four were ambivalent. Of the remaining two, one was disqualified because she doesn't do any searching herself, while the other didn't answer, claiming the question wasn't applicable to her situation.

There were notable exceptions, but for the most part those who preferred searching alone were special librarians (3-2) while those who preferred to have the requestor present were university librarians (5-1).

Here, briefly presented, are some of the arguments for both sides of the issue:

Those who preferred searching alone said that talking to the user slows down efficiency, but it really can't be avoided at the terminal since most of the time the user is new to online work and often can't quickly assimilate what is being printed. In addition, it is often next to impossible to schedule a time when the searcher, the user, and the terminal are all free. You also tend to make more mistakes when someone is looking over your shoulder, especially when you're a new searcher. Often, too, there is pressure from the user to jump through the pre-search interview and to get online, when the user knows that he will be watching the search.

The ideal situation, then, is a thorough pre-search interview, after which the librarian can search on his or her own time (often taking advantage of non-prime time rates). Then the librarian can go back to the user for feedback and debugging, if necessary.

Those who preferred searching with the requestor present said that the searcher is considered to be the interface between the user and the information. The user is the subject expert, and should work alongside the searcher to extract all the relevant material from the human-machine interface. The user can improve efficiency by making quick judgments on material emerging from the machine,

thereby relieving the searcher of the burden of title interpretation and evaluation of tangential material.

Immediate feedback, user education, and good public relations were cited as good reasons to have the requestor present for the search. One librarian said "It's utilizing the subject expertise while the subject expertise is right there at hand".

The ones who were ambivalent said that it depended upon the request and the requestor. The librarian should have the discretion to decide either way, not being forced by a rigid policy. Generally, they said that if the requestor is a subject expert and the librarian is not, then the requestor should be present. If the requestor is no expert, and the librarian feels confident with the subject, then the librarian should search alone.

One might consider what the responses to this question mean for the evaluation of service. It would seem that if we are to make any valuable statements about evaluation of reference service, we must present some kind of criteria against which any library can measure its own performance. In this question most of the respondents mentioned the strong influence on search efficiency brought about by the presence or absence of the user. Yet there is absolutely no agreement on the position of whether the requestor should be present or not. If, as this question might indicate, search efficiency is more a function of individual search skill, how are we to establish standard criteria by which to evaluate reference service? In this paper the question is directed toward the particular service of online searching, yet it is possible that it can be generalized to apply to all reference activities.

ONLINE USERS GROUP

13. An online users group seems to be "coming of age" in Washington State. How could such an online users group best help you?

14. Do you think there are different ways that such an online users

group could help other users?

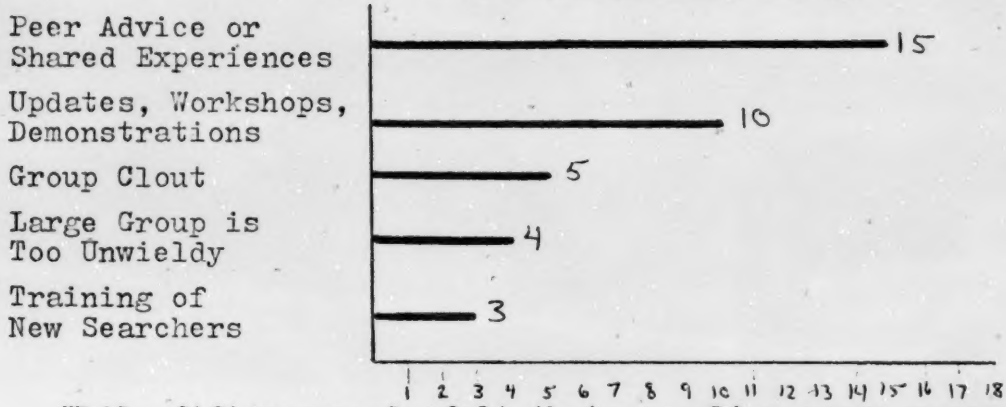
#13 is directed specifically to the respondent, then #14 allows her to generalize her response to searchers with different experience and in different situations.

For the most part, the answers received for both questions were similar. The one difference was that only one person mentioned the use of group clout on vendors or data base suppliers in #13, while four more mentioned it in #14. Apparently they didn't relate the use of group clout to their own personal need, but thought of it in relation to the entire population of online searchers.

The combined responses to these two questions can be found in Table 5:

Table 5

Value of an Online Users Group



While fifteen people felt that an online users group would be helpful in the field of shared experiences and peer advice, four people believed that a state-wide group was too unwieldy. They felt that a smaller, data base-oriented group would be better. The feeling most often expressed among these respondents was that with regards to something as specialized as online searching, you need to deal with those colleagues who are working in the same fields and on the same data bases, in order to make valuable use of your time.

Updates, workshops and demonstrations were next mentioned as being valuable services that an online users group could provide. Some librarians mentioned group clout in connection with this, while

others spoke of the need to schedule these events in conjunction with group meetings.

One point that was made was that aid to fellow searchers must be limited, due to time constraints. Another librarian expressed the opinion that interaction among searchers noticeably improves the quality of searches.

A couple of people mentioned that an online users group could help new searchers in getting a service started, while another said that the group could help to consult non-searchers in whether or not they need online services in their libraries. There were a few people who emphasized the development of personal contacts within the group, and the need of a sense of cohesion, especially among those who are the only online searchers in their respective libraries.

Three people spoke of the value of a directory of data base expertise, even though it is a fait accompli. Two of them tied it in with the value of shared experiences, and were counted in that category as well.

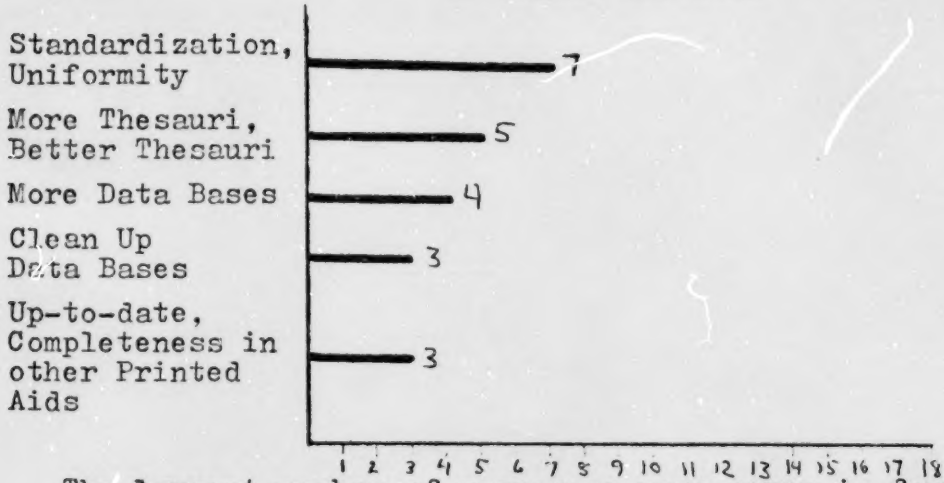
IMPROVEMENTS IN PRODUCTION OR SUPPLYING OF ONLINE SERVICES

15. What kind of improvements in the production or supplying of online services would help you best?

Most of the respondents understood that this question referred to those who are responsible for producing the tapes and marketing the service, the vendors and data base producers. For those who didn't understand immediately, it was explained in greater detail. It should have been made more apparent to begin with, but there seemed to be no damage done, as all of the librarians directed their responses to the question as it was originally intended. The responses may be found in Table 6:

Table 6

Improvements in Production or Supplying of Online Services



The largest number of responses were seven in favor of standardization, or uniformity, of the product. Areas of contention differed, but the feeling was that there is a wide need for uniformity within a machine-retrieval system. Their responses referred to uniformity within data bases, across data bases, and across vendors.

To solve these problems, thesauri were sometimes mentioned. People wanted complete, up-to-date thesauri, and they wanted them for all the data bases with which they worked. This isn't to say that they shunned free-text searching; those that mentioned it had high praise for the capabilities of free-text searching. They did, however, see the need for some kind of controlled vocabulary for all their files.

Of the four people who wanted more data bases, there was no great consensus as to what kind of new data bases they would like to see. Two mentioned soft sciences, one mentioned hard sciences, and one mentioned non-bibliographic data bases.

Three people specifically said that the data bases should be cleaned up, providing a uniformity of entry that could be relied upon. These people run the range from social sciences to physical sciences.

Two librarians said that better communications or better relations are needed. One mentioned the topic in regards to the relationship between librarians and those who supply the data bases. The other

said that the vendors must interface more with the data base suppliers to eliminate errors before it is too late to correct them.

One item that was mentioned in other questions, but which pertains to this one, was the problem with different vendors' software. Five people talked about the difficulties they've had personally, or in the course of training others. They mention the difficulties in maintaining expertise in two or more vendor languages. And while the addition of BRS is eagerly anticipated by some, to others it presents the problem of stretching a limited amount of online searching across a widening expanse of data base vendors.

POINTERS FOR NEW SEARCHERS

16. Let's say I was a new searcher in charge of beginning an online service at my library. What kinds of pointers would you give me to help me out?

This was probably the most open-ended question. What was sought here were the kinds of things that came immediately to mind when they were put in a position of helping a fledgling searcher. It was hoped that they would draw on their not-too-distant experience as newcomers to the field in order to give the newcomers of today an idea of what to prepare for.

As may be expected, the answers were as varied as the personalities of the respondents. Yet there were a few items that received a number of votes.

The most cited item was the need to get and use the appropriate manuals. Six people emphasized this. The feeling was that the proper support materials would improve tremendously the efficiency and confidence of the new searcher.

After this there were three items that received four votes apiece. They were:

1) Plan for Publicity
2) Plan Search Strategy
3) Attend Workshops and User Groups

The second item wasn't really what was sought for this question, as it is likely that all the respondents would have mentioned the need for it if it had been put to them directly, but there was no attempt to put a lid on the answers to this question. Perhaps it is meaningful that four librarians felt it important enough to emphasize it in this context, especially since the question referred to a new searcher.

There were four items that received three votes apiece. They were:

1) Promote Selectively
2) Know how to Interview
3) Determine All Costs
4) "Plunge In Fearlessly"

As can be seen, many of these items occurred earlier in the questionnaire. It is difficult to say whether the respondents thought of them now because of their earlier occurrence, or whether they arose independently. This questionnaire was not sophisticated to the extent that the questions were rotated at random.

The last item, "plunge in fearlessly" (mentioned earlier in #7-#8), is intriguing because these people referred to the experience in almost the same terms. They spoke of the need to immerse yourself in the service in order to gain experience, and thus gain confidence in your online abilities.

There were a number of other items which one or two respondents mentioned. Two said that all policies must be written down. Two others said that the new searcher should do some practice questions before offering the service to his or her users. One emphasized the importance of starting the search service with the requestor present at the terminal, while another emphasized the importance of starting alone.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

17. Are there any additional comments you would like to make, either about anything we discussed, or about online services in general?

If the previous sixteen questions didn't give them the chance

to air their pet gripe or favorite philosophy of online work, it was hoped that they might do it here.

Most of their responses reiterated some point that they had made earlier. Other respondents took the opportunity to comment upon their feelings about online work and what the future looks like.

There were four people who were especially enthusiastic about the growth and dynamic nature of online searching. Two others mentioned that it was the favorite part of their jobs. Three people took this opportunity to express the need for integrating online searching into regular reference work.

Of the four respondents who were enthusiastic about its growth, two cited the increased productivity of their library due to online searching. One of them mentioned that as more services are available online, it is becoming more cost-effective all the time.

Two people mentioned the problem of interlibrary loan, recognizing that this was most often the "tortoise" in the process of speeding the information to the user.

There were many who had some sort of "desiderata" to cite. Some of the topics raised were:

*The need for more promotion of online services.
*The desire for a Seattle-Vancouver vendor branch office.
*More training for the reference interview.
*Bring down prices.
*Educate the public about online capabilities and disadvantages.
*Subject-specific training programs to standardize skills.
*Put all card catalogs online.
*Read the vendor newsletter.

Summary of the Findings:

To summarize, here is a synopsis of the findings of some of the sections:

Promotion of Online Services: Seminars or demonstrations, printed material, and word-of-mouth advertising were all cited equally often. However, when an emphasis was made, word-of-mouth was cited over demonstrations by 3-2. In addition, those that cited demonstrations and printed materials were mostly those who didn't charge their users,

while those who cited word-of-mouth tended to be those who charged for online services.

Skills for Beginning Online Searchers: Good reference abilities led the list by far, while subject specialty and the possession of a good mind came in second and third. Online skill-specific items, such as training, logic skills, and prior online experience all trailed the more general abilities.

Maintenance of Expertise: The average cited was a range of 18-25 searches per month. However, the range of response was great, and there was really no consensus of what a good maintenance level was. Six of the respondents fell short of their own goals for maintenance, four of them admitting it.

Fee or No Service: The overwhelming response was in favor of offering the service for a fee if necessary, allowing the user the option of requesting an online search. There was some qualification, though, especially concerning the public library's role in charging for online work, or doing it for free.

Search Alone or with the Requestor Present: Probably the most controversial issue, this raised some basic philosophies of online searching. Six wanted the requestor present, six wanted to search alone, and four were ambivalent. There was a tendency for special librarians to prefer searching alone, and university librarians to prefer having the requestor present.

Online Users Group: Peer advice and shared experiences are seen as the most valuable aids to searchers that a users group could offer. Workshops and group clout were cited next, with some searchers believing that a state-wide group is too unwieldy.

Improvements in Production or Supplying of Services: Standardization and uniformity of the product is most cited, with more and better thesauri desired as good tools towards this end, as well as generally improving search efficiency.

Pointers for New Searchers: Acquire and use the manuals you need. Then were cited the tips to plan for publicity, plan search strategy, and attend workshops and user groups.

CONCLUSION

Since this questionnaire covered a potpourri of questions, there is no single conclusion that can be drawn. For the most part the data is organized so that it speaks for itself. In this sense, the summary to the data is the conclusion. However, the author would like to add a few comments about the purpose of this study.

It was mentioned earlier that the purpose of this questionnaire was to "take the pulse" of the online users in Washington State, to identify those areas of consensus and of contention. In doing this it was hoped that online users and other interested librarians would be given the knowledge they need to spark an informed dialogue on the state of online searching in Washington, and where we would like to go from here. This report is an attempt at a first step in establishing this dialogue, and the reader should be encouraged to consider this report in that light -- as one step out of many. The author would like to encourage librarians to consider what these findings mean to the future of online searching: For those topics in contention, how can we come to a meaningful resolution? For those topics in consensus, are they moving in the direction in which we would like to see them move? If not, how are we to alter the trends?

One thing that encouraged the initiation of this study was the emergence of an online users group in Washington. This study might be seen as an aid to an establishment of a sense of identity among online users in conjunction with the emergence of this group. Also, this group may provide a forum for further study of any of the issues raised here.

This survey asked a mixed bag of questions, and so received back a mixed bag of opinions and advice. In the course of this study it became clear that the points to consider when operating an online service include both things that are particular to online searching and topics that are easily generalized to any type of library service. The multi-faceted nature of online work makes it fascinating at some times, frustrating at others. Many of those interviewed seemed to

relish this challenge, seeing an innovative way to provide the user with quality service. This study is, after all, an attempt to aid the online searcher in providing that quality service.

The author welcomes all comments, including inquiries regarding variations of the results which were not included in this report, but which the reader may be interested in, and may be gleaned from these questions. Communications may be addressed to:

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